

A-
B+

CINEMA 505 Fall 1980

An Analysis of the Films Screened
in Cinema 505, in Terms of
Northrop Frye's System of Mythoi:
Romance, Tragedy, Irony, & Comedy

By Stephen Bowlsby

Stephen -
An unusual but often very interesting
paper. I believe, at times, you tried too
hard to make things fit, but you did
illuminate certain films, it quite
intriguing way. What I miss here is
some overall statement of the validity of
Frye's approach and its applicability to
the criticism and evaluation of film. It also
would have helped if you had taken things a
bit further and offered some generalized notions about
Hollywood film during our period based
on the framework and philosophy
provided by Frye. Though
your paper is, in many
ways, quite ambitious
it cries out
for expansion

CINEMA 503 TERM PAPER

Stephen BowlsbyAn Analysis of the Films Screened in Cinema 503, in
Terms of Northrop Frye's System of Mythoi: Romance,
Tragedy, Irony, and Comedy.INTRODUCTION

At first my intention was to study the archetypes found in all the film genres. This being too broad, I decided to focus on the main dramatic "modes" as seen in the film genres of the 1925 - 50 period. Frye's term for mode in this context is mythos (plural mythoi), as set out in his Anatomy of Criticism (1957). Becoming more realistic by the day, I narrowed the study further, to the specific films we have seen in class*, with reference to genre when possible. And finally, as I found myself hacking through the obscure scholarly prose of Frye's Anatomy, all the supporting examples of which I had never read, I realized that I would have no time to include other systematic descriptions of the dramatic forms, as a balance to his.

The subject is totally new to me, and all I have to go on is Frye's system. In fact much of the labour of this paper has been in the attempt to comprehend Frye's system and summarize it for discussion. Courageous as the attempt has been, the results are undoubtably half-baked, and my interpretations may at times seem odd, if only because I have no other knowledge of the dramatic mythoi to put Frye's analysis into perspective.

A distinction I should make before summarizing Frye's system is that the focus of this enquiry is on structure as opposed to texture: "the one being large scale, a matter of arrangement, the other small scale, a matter of impressionism... In the last analysis, structure is a matter of memory, texture of immediacy." (Roger Fowler, Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms, 1973)

FRYE'S SYSTEMModes

There is a basic breakdown of literature on the basis of the "power of action" of the protagonist: (pg. 33, 34)

1. "If superior in kind to other men and to the environment of other men, the hero is a divine being, and the story about him will be a myth..."

* Except for The Best Years of Our Lives, which I missed, and Sullivan's Travels, which came too late.

2. "If superior in degree to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of romance, whose actions are marvelous but who is himself identified as a human being. He moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended."

3. "If superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment, the hero is a leader. He has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature. This is the hero of the high mimetic mode..."

4. "If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity... This gives us the hero of the low mimetic mode."

5. "If inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have a sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity, the hero belongs to the ironic mode."

Tragic and Comic Modes

There is a general division between plots in which the hero becomes isolated from his society (tragic) and those in which he is incorporated into it (comic). Each of the modes deals with the comic or tragic tendency from a qualitatively different point of view. I won't list the differences here, but I will use this preliminary prescription to get a bearing on the mythos for each film. In fact, it is not entirely clear how these factors relate one to one with the four mythoi, but then it's all terribly obscure anyway, so what the hell.

The Organizing Archetypes

Frye sees the modes as a series of displaced myths, moving steadily toward versimilitude, and then, at irony, beginning to move back to myth again.

Mythic archetypes consist of two contrasting worlds of "total metaphorical identity". One is the Apocalyptic, in which god, man, animals and nature are all "humanized", represented by singulars, and are at one with each other. The other is the Demonic, in which the gods are separate from man and have their own wants, the powers of nature are menacing, and the tyrant and sacrificed victim are common. While myth is action at or near the limits of desire, the lower modes are analogical; the romantic mode is the analogy of innocence (idealized, black and white); the low mimetic is the analogy of experience; and the ironic is realism.

It is the movement within these archetypes that produces the four mythoi. There are two basic movements; cyclical, within the order of nature; and dialectical, from that order into the apocalyptic and demonic. The top part of the cycle is Romance, reaching epiphany with the apocalyptic. The bottom part of the cycle is Irony, reaching demonic epiphany. The movement downward from Romance to Irony is Tragedy. The movement upwards from Irony to Romance is Comedy. He describes this distinction in another way as well, as a sequence seen within the Romance structure:

"The four mythoi... may now be seen as four aspects of a central unifying myth. Agon or conflict is the basis or archetypal theme of romance, the radical of romance being a sequence of marvelous adventures. Pathos or catastrophe, whether in triumph or in defeat, is the archetypal theme of tragedy.

"Sparagmos, or the sense that heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized or foredoomed to defeat, and that confusion and anarchy reign over the world, is the archetypal theme of irony and satire. Anagnoris, or the recognition of a newborn society rising in triumph around a still somewhat mysterious hero and his bride, is the archetypal theme of comedy." (pg 192)

This unifying myth is also associated with the progression of the four seasons.

The Mythos of Spring - Comedy

The typical plot is: hero wants girl, but there's a blocking character, and finally at the end a twist (comic discovery) allows the hero to succeed. All conflict is reconciled at the end, there is no exposure or disgrace. There is a general movement from one society to another: from the comic/absurd one, represented by the blocking character, to the "redeemed" one represented by the hero and heroine, the ideals of which are not formulated, but which the audience identifies with.

The blocking character or alazon is usually paternal or associated with established power, and is characterized by some sort of obsession or lack of self-knowledge. The obstacle may also be, instead, some sort of irrational law, whim of a tyrant, or rash promise.

Another important character is the eiron, who initiates the comic action. He could be 1) the hero played down as hero, or 2) a schemer who helps the hero, or 3) a benevolent withdrawing and returning figure.

Often the hero and heroine are less interesting than the eiron and alazon. There are also buffoons, and straight-men to polarize the comic mood.

The theme of comedy is a social judgement against the absurd (the alazon and his "society"), not a moral judgement against the wicked.

Each of Frye's mythoi are divided into six phases, the first and last three paralleling the corresponding phases of the adjacent mythos.

Phases

(paralleling first three of irony)

1. The humorous/absurd society triumphs. Close to the demonic world.

2. The hero simply escapes the society. Quixotic.

3. The norm as discussed above.

(paralleling second three of romance)

4. The action occurs on two social planes, the redeemed and the comic.

5. The redeemed world is the established order. Moves from world of confusion to upper world of order.

6. Collapse and disintegration of the comic society. The units of comedy become small and esoteric. (HORROR FILMS)

The Mythos of Summer - Romance

Romance is close to the wish-fulfillment dream. The typical form is the successful quest, in which we identify with the hero, who is associated with spring, dawn, order and vigour. He is in conflict with those who oppose the quest, and who are associated with winter, darkness, confusion and

sterility.

The quest itself goes through four stages which incorporate the whole unifying myth described above: conflict of hero and enemy; death struggle; disappearance of hero; and "discovery and recognition" of the hero.

Phases

(parrallelling first three of tragedy)

1. Birth of hero.
2. Youth of hero. Pastoral.
3. The successful quest.

(parrallelling last three of comedy)

4. Maintaining the integrity of an innocent world against the assault of experience.
5. Detached and contemplative; experience comprehended.
6. Story told from a comfortable place, so it doesn't confront us.

I have not bothered to explain the phases more carefully because as we will see only the third phase appears in the films.

The Mythos of Autumn - Tragedy

Here, the hero is "halfway between a world of paradisaal freedom and a world of bondage". He is great compared to us, but small compared to God or Fate or Accident or Necessity or Circumstance. In other words, he is caught between free will and determinism.

Some original act promotes "an antithetical or counter balancing movement, and the completion of the movement resolves the tragedy" (pg 209). A balance is disturbed and the nemesis rights that balance, regardless of the moral quality of the hero's motivation.

Frye refutes the two reductive theories of tragedy. The idea that tragedy exhibits the omnipotence of external fate is incorrect because the fate becomes external only after the tragic process has been triggered. That tragedy is due to the violation of a moral law, Aristotle's view, is wrong because an innocent sufferer is tragic. Tragedy "eludes the antithesis of moral responsibility and arbitrary fate." (pg 211)

D.D. Raphael, in his The Paradox of Tragedy (1959), also refutes Aristotle's Poetics, and I found his analysis useful in understanding Frye's. Raphael describes tragedy in this way: Necessity triumphs physically, but the human spirit triumphs on its own plane and is more elevating. The audience has a god's eye view, through division of knowledge, so we don't feel small compared to the hero, and a balance is provided between sympathy (pity) and admiration.

The characterization is essentially the reverse of comedy. The nemesis is the eiron; the hero is the alazon, self-deceived by hubris. (OVERLY ARROGANT OR PASSIONATE)

Phases

(parrallelling the first three of romance)

1. Hero has greatest dignity, through courage and innocence.
 2. Innocence in the sense of inexperience (Romeo and Juliet).
- Hero may survive, adjusting to new maturity.

3. Emphasis on success and completeness of hero's achievement, either 1) as the paradox of victory within tragedy, or 2) as a tragedy caused by a previous tragic act, this time ending in serenity.

(parralleling the last three of irony)

4. Fall of the hero through hubris and hamartia, from innocence to experience. (FATAL FLAW)

5. Heroic decreased; characters seen in smaller perspective and in lower state of freedom than the audience. A sense of lost direction, lack of knowledge, and fatalism.

6. Shock as the total effect. Demonic epiphany.

The Mythos of Winter - Irony and Satire

Frye does not explain his use of the term "irony", save to call it a parody of romance, and the non-heroic residue of tragedy.

The first three phases, comic irony, are satire, in which there are clear moral norms.

Phases

(parrallelling the first three of comedy)

1. No displacement of the absurd society. It "takes for granted a world which is full of anomalies, injustices, follies, and crimes, and yet is permanent and undisplaceable." (pg 226) The protagonist is the straight man. The principal of this world is keeping your eyes open and your mouth shut, following convention, and flexible pragmatism.

2. Quixotic satire; the "setting of ideas, generalizations, theories and dogmas over and against the life they are supposed to explain" (pg 230) The protagonist is the successful rogue who makes society look foolish without giving any positive standard.

3. Even common sense is questioned. Life is given a self-consistent shift of perspective. It produces a delirium that, upon awakening from it, we wonder if it was not really true. It trusts the reality of the senses instead of conventions. It is aware of our biology frustrating our dignity.

(parrallelling the last three phases of tragedy)

4. Pathos; quixotic irony; bringing out the "all too human", instead of the heroic, tragedy. It "looks at tragedy from below", from the perspective of experience. It minimizes the sense of ritual inevitability, gives social and psychological reasons, and implies that human misery is avoidable.

5. Emphasizes the natural cycle, the wheel of fate. Less moral and more metaphysical; stoical; resigned. Respect for the immediate, not the theoretical. (Oh Lucky Man)

6. Unrelieved bondage; social tyranny; parody of religion; figures of misery or madness; demonic epiphany.

THE FILMS

Most of the films have somewhat clear connections with particular mythoi. I will follow them here as in the progression of the unifying myth, falling from Romance, through Tragedy, into Irony and Satire, and climbing up again through Comedy.

The Sea Hawk (1940), is clearly a romance. It stands alone; none of the other films even come close to the romance mythos.

It is also the only film that clearly approaches the high mimetic mode; all the others are low mimetic or ironic. The hero of The Sea Hawk triumphs over huge odds, gets the girl, and is knighted, putting the story on the comic side; and in high mimetic comedy, according to Frye "we notice that just as there is a catharsis of ~~of~~ pity and fear in tragedy, so there is a catharsis of the corresponding comic emotions, which are sympathy and ridicule." (pg 43) We identify with Errol Flynn, and in the end we can ridicule the Spanish.

The wish-fulfillment runs its course as the central quest phase of romance. The four aspects of the central myth that unites the four mythoi are here: from the dialectical conflict of the hero and the demonic enemy (the sea battle and intrigues in South America); to the "death struggle" in the jungle; to the "disappearance" of the hero in the bowels of the slave ship; to the "discovery and recognition" of the hero in the last act.

With The Public Enemy and Humoresque we find ourselves moving from the world of romance into the world of irony; from myth and innocence to realism and experience-- the downward movement of tragedy. Both of these films are in the low mimetic mode. In this mode tragedy stressed pathos, and the isolation of an individual (an alazon) by a weakness we can relate to.

Both of these films must be interpreted in their historical context. Bergman (1971) discusses how the Depression confronted a public raised on Dale Carnegie's success formula with the sudden fact that "a success story inside the law was unthinkable-- the only credible success saga was one that ended in death." (pg 10)

Ostensibly, Tommy Power's brother is presented as a noble alternative, but the effect must have been the exact opposite-- a lifetime of punching tickets is hardly an acceptable alternative-- and the result was that "the vitality of outlaws was self-justifying." (pg 16) Washow, in The Immediate Experience, stresses the tragedy: "the gangster's whole life is an effort to assert himself as an individual... and he always dies because he is an individual." (pg 88).

To a 1931 audience, the story of Tommy Powers fits the specifications of tragedy, where necessity triumphs physically, but the human spirit triumphs on its own plane. It is tragedy on the ironic end, and I would place it in phase four, emphasizing the hero's hamartia. On the other hand, there is a sense of fatalism and reduced heroism that makes it lean towards phase five.

Humoresque is even more ironic, and with its more complex and unconvincing layering of themes, it represents to me the overlap of the two adjacent ends of tragedy and irony/satire; that is, it can be seen as ironic tragedy or as tragic irony.

Warner's women's films usually promoted the emancipated woman as wish fulfillment (Hollywood in the Forties), but in the later forties the themes became more ironic and convoluted (Haskell, 1974) as the men returned from the war to join the work force.

In Humoresque, Joan Crawford falls in love with John Garfield and struggles with his devotion to his career. But the erosion of her self assurance, and finally her suicide, is inconsistent with her nature. Rosen says of the character, in

Popcorn Venus: "Her irrational possessiveness embodies the wish fulfillment of a society preferring to write off independence as a shallow veneer. Underneath it, Hollywood implied, lies helpless, incapacitating desire and devouring, suffocating love which is hostile to life itself." (pg 92)

Seeing it as ironic tragedy, we have a woman with a greater spirit than most of us (half way between paradisaal freedom and bondage) battling with what is seen as necessity or fate, disturbing a balance of nature, falling through her own hubris and hamatia. She is the tragic alazon and Garfeild the eiron or nemesis. In this case Garfeild's piano-playing friend may be seen as a figure of pathos used to focus the mood of tragedy.

But we can also see the film as something of a romance parody, emphasizing the "all too human", the theme of puzzled defeat, more stoical and resigned. Certainly if she is supposed to be the main point of interest her heroic stature is reduced by upstaging her with Garfeild all the time. In this case we are on the side of tragic irony, and Garfeild's friend becomes an ironic/cynical mood focusser.

Moving down square into the middle of the ironic mythos, we come to Scarlet Street and The Crowd.

By Frye's definition there is little tragic about Edward G. Robinson's character, for "if the hero was not sufficient to have stood, the mode is purely ironic." This man is a loser from the beginning.

Partly, there is a sense of the quixotic as in phase four irony, because of his romantically blinkered innocence; and there is even a sense of tragedy, phase four, the fall from innocence to experience. But the greatest aspect is the sense of the random victim, the idea that what has happened to him is out of line with his character. The emphasis is thus on the wheel of fate of phase five irony. The terrible shame and disillusionment he feels after the death of the two shysters, along with the film noir expressionism at that same point, suggests the demonic epiphany of stage six irony (though coming as it does only at the end, it is more in keeping with phase six tragedy).

The more developed film noirs like Out of the Past seem to have gone full circle within irony to pick up a hint of phase one satire, with the main character as the eiron.

The best example of the purely and extremely ironic is Vidor's The Crowd. We constantly look down on the protagonist with a sense of mocking fatalism that, according to John Baxter (1976), is consistent with King Vidor's worldview of America as a treacherous and actively hostile environment in which survival is subject to caprice and malevolent destiny. The husband and wife are drained of their love and optimism, and they lose a child in an accident, but "the crowd is indifferent to suffering." Even when the sight of his son prevents his suicide and keeps him going, nothing is won. The Crowd borders on the demonic epiphany of phase six irony.

Still in the mythos of winter, but starting to move up a little into comedy, are the satires of Duck Soup and Topaze.

Topaze is full of irony, satire, and comedy, but fitting it into Frye's system is difficult. Up to the point where he realizes his duplicity, Professor Topaze is seen in the ironic mode-- he has an inferior power of action, and we watch with a detached objectivity. But whether it is on the comic or tragic side is hard to discern. Frye says that the tragic ironic mode becomes the study of isolation without the element of the special case causing it, but with Topaze his own naive idealism is responsible. So that puts it in the comic ironic mode, which reduces to a theme of social revenge on an individual, with the rejection of the fool, buffoon, or simpleton being one of the most terrible ironies. Comic irony in the mythos sense means satire, and this term seems to suit the film best.

For the first two acts, Topaze runs closely parallel to Scarlet Street, with Topaze being a more comic and therefore more satiric irony, but still containing the quixotic parody of romance with the Myrna Loy character. In the third act, when their respective duplicities are discovered, the two films part company. Where Robinson was destroyed, John Barrymore turns his new knowledge to his advantage (much to our surprise). We step up to the low mimetic mode where the comic hero is the likeable but unprincipled rogue who, by a plot twist, is incorporated into the society, becomes wealthy, and gets the girl. But as comedy it cannot be phase three, where the comic society is overthrown. The result is that Topaze has adopted the eiron role of phase one satire.

C.E.J. Caldicott(1977) says of Marcel Pagnol's original play: "Satire usually aims to provoke reform; the fact that this is Pagnol's last satirical play might therefore suggest that he here abandons hope of further reform." The absurd society triumphs, but Topaze is sitting on its shoulders, a kind of double irony.

The only article published that even mentions the film is by Herman G. Weinberg (1969), on the director's career, in which he calls the film "a bitter-sweet harlequinade on the fruits of chicanery". If I can take this to mean it is a comically ironic story of a simpleton buffoon who learns the art of deception, then maybe it supports my analysis.

Duck Soup is a straight satire of the most comical sort. The preceeding Marx Brothers films were most like second phase satire, paralleling second phase comedy where the hero "gets around" the absurd society. Of course the absurd society in satire is our normal conventional one. The Marx brothers as "outsiders" made aspects of conventional society look foolish, without giving any positive standard. But in Duck Soup the brothers are now in control of the entire society, which, in comedy, means the overturning of the society, which shifts us over to phase three.

Phase three satire produces a delirium that was too hard for the audiences at the time to handle. They wanted "an attack on dictatorship, a satiric crusade against political evil. But Duck Soup was an attack on political anything; it came out of the deepest cynicism about all government." (Bergman 1971, pg 35) As the New Deal picked up steam it "utterly cut the ground from under Groucho as prime minister." (Bergman, pg37) Screwball comedy emerged in contrast. It worked to pull things together

rather than break them apart, and Groucho returned to the role of the outsider.

This, of course, brings us finally to the movement upward from irony toward romance again, and the mythos of comedy seen in Swing Time and Palm Beach Story.

Swing Time is a good example of the comedy standard of phase three. Young, likeable Fred Astaire wants young, likeable Ginger Rogers, and the barrier, rather than an alazon, is a rash promise-- to marry his fiance, who he's not particularly crazy about (she's not a dancer), as soon as he makes a particular sum of money. Regardless of the morality of it, we want to see Astaire and Rogers get together.

The emphasis of the story is on the "discovery and reconciliation" more than the barrier, and that makes it a more romantic comedy, tending toward phase four where "the redeemed society" of the dancer is already established.

Astaire is the eiron, pretending to be something he is not and initiating the comic action. The fiance's father could be considered a "vestigial" alazon, and Ricardo too takes on that function later. Frye doesn't discuss the form where there is no dominant alazon, an unfortunate oversight. Astaire's sidekick is an example of the buffoon character, and Roger's sidekick is the straight man.

The twist is that his fiance doesn't really want to marry him. Ricardo gives up Ginger Rogers with implausible quiescence, Astaire and Rogers have become a famous dance couple, and the buffoon and the straight man have even gotten together. All is reconciled, just as a good phase three comedy should do.

There has been a movement "from a society controlled by habit, ritual bondage, arbitrary law and the older characters to a society controlled by youth and pragmatic freedom" (pg 168). It is the movement from illusion to reality. "hense the importance of the theme of creating and dispelling illusion in comedy: the illusions caused by disguise, obsession, or hypocrisy."

The Palm Beach Story follows the above theme even more strongly, and in some ways it is even a better example of phase three comedy than is Swing Time.

As a screwball comedy, one might expect a sexual struggle for supremacy in which the husband is the alazon. But in this film it makes more sense to see the millionaire fool as the alazon; the husband as the hero, who we feel deserves a break; and the wife as the eiron, the schemer who helps the hero and initiates the comic action. The complications and subterfuge become absurd, enhanced by the addition of the millionaire's sister (a common type of complication in this form), and finally the discovery and reconciliation of marrying the husband and wife's twins has got to be the quintessence of the ridiculous and implausible plot twist that is a major trait of phase three comedy.

How closely this structure represents screwball comedy, however, is confusing. In our class seminar it was suggested that screwball comedy was speeded up comedy of manners-- a form which Frye refers to as being in the ironic mode, close to parody of tragic irony; a kind of satire. We sympathize with those excluded from society (the nutty woman) and ridicule the

defenses of the male alazon. This is not phase three comedy. It was also suggested in class that screwball comedy is close to farce, which Frye doesn't even mention.

However, it was also suggested that screwball comedy combines this sort of put-down with wish fulfillment. "Their wackiness cemented social classes and broken marriages... screwball comedy was implosive; it worked to pull things together." (Bergman, pg 133) I would suggest then that this confusing combination comes from from the fact that the structure of screwball comedy may be phase three comedy, while the texture presents the aspects of comedy-of-manners and farce. These textural elements then, in the case of The Palm Beach Story would be such things as the character of the obnoxious but kind old rich man at the beginning, and the hunting club on the train. *Very interesting*

I had a hard time with The Invisible Man. It prompted a survey of the horror genre in my attempt to fit it into place.

At first I thought Griffin might be a tragic figure, having good intentions at the start, but meeting his nemesis through the hamartia of meddling with nature. This would be valid if the focus were on Griffin's point of view, but most of the drama of the film is from Griffin's effect on Kemp, Flora, and the audience. In fact, as Bruce Dettman (1976) says, Griffin was portrayed as a "true demonical fiend, spewing forth his hatred and contempt for visible humanity. Even at the end we are little moved by any sense of tragedy for Griffin and the fate his interference with nature brought him."

Some horror film archetypes mentioned by Kaminsky (1974) are the inevitability of death, loss of identity, alienation, the monster as concrete form of death or disease, fear of the unknown, loss of control. He says the effect is the purging of suppressed instincts, just as Jung saw dreams of pursuing animals as instincts needing integration into consciousness. The closest stories mentioned by Frye are those of St. George and the Dragon and Perseus and Gorgon, which he gives as examples of tragedy in the Romance mode, ~~and~~ which is elegiac and melancholy. Perhaps the heroic action that destroys the monster in horror films is romantic but it can hardly be the main structure. A more likely candidate would be phase six irony-- its demonic epiphany fitting the usual motifs of graphic disfigurement and desecrated graves.

To my surprise, the conclusive clue about what to call the horror film comes from Frye's brief reference to, of all things, phase six (romantic) comedy. This is the disintegration of the comic society, where the units of comedy become small, esoteric, sometimes confined to one individual. Here we have "the love of the occult and the marvelous, the sense of individual detachment from routine existence. In this kind of comedy we have finally left the world of wit and the awakened critical intelligence for the opposite pole, an oracular solemnity which, if we surrender to it, will provide a delightful frisson*. This is the world of ghost stories, thrillers, and Gothic romances..." (pg 185)

And so it turns out that the horror genre, and The Invisible Man, take their place solidly on the border between comedy and romance, and the cycle is completed.

*shiver; thrill

Now there are three films left whose mythos structure is less clear (even) than the ones already covered: Mr. Smith Goes to Washington; and the two films of John Ford, My Darling Clementine and They Were Expendable.

Mr. Smith is not so much ambiguous as ambivalent. The mythos structure that fits this film closest is comedy, with Jefferson Smith as hero-turned-eiron, Saunders as a secondary eiron, and Senator Paine as alazon. The comic/absurd society is overturned in the end (Capra's first ending showed the destruction of the political machine that opposed Smith). But the film does not seem comical, at least not in the phase three formula just described.

It starts with the same ironic structure as Topaze and Scarlet Street. Then, for most of the conflict of the film, it seems to be phase one comedy, where the comic/absurd society is indestructable. When it becomes phase three comedy and the redeemed society wins, there is a definite lack of reconciliation of the blocking characters. There is "too much happy ending glee over the confession of a man who just tried to kill himself", says Donald C. Willis in his book on Capra (1974).

All the way through is the theme of innocence versus experience, which is phase four romance, but in romance the innocent world is the controlling one.

The problem lies in the strong morality of the film. Recall that the sense of "rightness" in the comic happy ending is not a moral but a social judgement. Says Frye (pg 167), "one feels that the social judgement against the absurd is closer to the comic norm than the moral judgement against the wicked." And he speaks directly to Mr. Smith when he says, "It is of course quite possible to have a moral comedy, but the result is often the kind of melodrama described as comedy without humor, and which achieves its happy ending with a self-righteous tone that most comedy avoids."

Mr. Smith Goes To Washington, then, is melodrama, in this sense defined as an incomplete, inappropriate, or twisted form of one of Frye's mythoi, and thus not really "archetypal" in Frye's scheme.

The two films of John Ford are difficult to deal with partly because neither has much of a structural story. Both achieve much of their richness through texture, and are perhaps better seen as examples of Ford's eclectic auteurism than anything archetypal in Frye's system of mythoi.

Clementine is basically a collection of John Ford character studies as Earp and his brothers wait around to get revenge and are drawn into the life of Tombstone. But the film is also considered to be the classic western by Lovell (1976), and most of Washow's description of the archetypal Westerner (1962) fits the character that Fonda plays, so whatever I get out of Clementine probably applies to the genre as well, and visa versa.

Looking at Lovell's western hero: "Sheriff or outlaw, he assumes the condition of an adventurer in spite of himself, with a patient sang-froid, to that he always appears to us to be on the defensive and poses as a witness or a victim of an implacable world." (pg 167)

Hm, the film is quite diff. from most of Ford's westerns

This pinpoints him as the eiron of phase one satire. If this is so, it must be a softened form of satire; but at least this does fit the ironic mythos in that it "attempts to give form to the shifting ambiguities and complexities of unidealized existence." (Frye, pg 223).

On the other hand, Washow describes the Westerner's loneliness and melancholy, indicating a tragic figure, "self contained and limited.... seeking only to assert his personal value, and his tragedy lies in the fact that even this circumscribed demand cannot be fully realized." (pg 143) This sounds like phase five (ironic) tragedy. The film is a study in realism; it is entirely in the low mimetic mode, and low mimetic tragedy has pathos. So does the film. The figure of pathos is associated with a failure of expression, an inability to articulate his situation. Doc Holiday fits this image-- we never know why he's destroying himself-- and do too does Wyatt-- we don't know why he leaves Clementine alone.

There are romantic elements in the struggle between the Clantons and the Earps, but it lacks the wish-fulfillment of romance. Perhaps the conflict is better seen as the melodrama of comedy without humor.

Actual humorous elements are used to undercut the dignity of the characters (such as Wyatt's perfume from the barber) and keep them from rising above the low mimetic mode.

The revenge theme is a relatively small part of the film. Doc's evasion of the effects of civilization, and the hesitant establishment of that civilization embodied by Clementine at the dance and at the end are stronger themes. The tension of the wild versus the controlled is a major theme, as in the three scenes with the travelling actor and with Doc reciting Shakespeare. This theme then, is perhaps the most important one to look at. Perhaps it is a tragic view, in the sense that tragedy "narrows free life into causation" (Frye, pg 40); but I really see no clear connection of this theme to any of the four mythoi.

Apart from these somewhat forced interpretations of irony, tragedy and satire, the conclusion I am left with is that Clementine is simply a low mimetic milieu that leans neither to the tragic nor the comic side, and whose strength is textural rather than structural.

Exactly the same must be said of They Were Expendable, with its episodic, documentary-like style; the stressing of duty and the social order; the undermining of "bringing things together" (Wayne doesn't meet with Donna Reed again). Perhaps it leans a little more toward tragic irony, or ironic tragedy than does Clementine, but essentially the two films are woven of the same fabric. Whether this implies a similarity between the Western and the War film is beyond my scope.

This concludes my study. Considering that prior to this course the American films of the nineteen twenties to fifties, and the concept of dramatic archetypes in general, were unknown to me; and despite the highly sophisticated and dense writing of Northrop Frye; I am pleased to find that I got more out of this study than I had hoped for, and a whole new realm has opened up for me. The exercise was worth it regardless of the ultimate truth of Frye's mythoi or of my interpretations.

REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baxter, John. 1976. King Vidor.
- Bergman, Andrew. 1971. We're in the Money: Depression America and its Films.
- Caldicott, C.E.J. 1977. Marcel Pagnol.
- Dettman, Bruce, and Bedford, Michael. 1976. The Horror Factory.
- Fergusson, Francis. 1961. Aristotle's Poetics.
- Fowler, Roger (editor) 1973. A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms.
- Frye, Northrup. 1957. Anatomy of Criticism.
- Haskell, Molly. 1974. From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies.
- Higham, Charles, and Greenberg, Joel. 1968. Hollywood in the Fourties.
- Kagan, Norman. 1970. The War Film.
- Kaminsky, Stuart M. 1974. American Film Genres.
- Lovell, Alan. 1976. "The Westerner", from Movies and Methods: An Anthology, edited by Bill Nichols.
- Raphael, D.D. 1959. The Paradox of Tragedy.
- Richards, Jeffry. 1972. "Frank Capra and the Cinema of Populism", Film Society Review
- Rosen, Marjorie. 1973. Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream.
- Was 'w, Robert. 1962. The Immediate Experience.
- Weisberg, Herman G. 1969. "D'Abbadie D'Arrast", Film Comment 5:3.
- Willis, Donald C. 1974. The Cinema of Frank Capra.